

GUIDANCE FOR ILLINOIS VOTERS: 2020 ELECTION



October 16, 2020



Office of the Illinois Attorney General

Guidance for Illinois Voters for the 2020 General Election

The Illinois General Assembly enacted new statutory provisions in an attempt to protect voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the Legislature amended the Election Code to expand access to mail-in voting and make other changes that are designed to ensure that Illinois voters do not have to choose between their health and their right to vote in the 2020 General Election. This document is intended to provide general guidance to Illinois voters.

Because some voters have reported receiving robocalls that appear to be designed to discourage voting by mail, the Attorney General's office is reminding all Illinois voters to contact their local election authority, the State Board of Elections, or visit those agencies' websites for reliable election information.

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Local Election Authorities and the Illinois State Board of Elections: Reliable Sources for Official Election Information

- **Who is my local election authority?** Your local election authority is either the county clerk of the county where you reside or the election commission of the municipality or county where you reside.

For most Illinois voters, the local election authority is the county clerk. However, there are six municipal election commissions and one county election commission in Illinois. The municipal election commissions are located in Bloomington, Chicago, Danville, East St. Louis, Galesburg, and Rockford. The county election commission is located in Peoria County. If you live in one of these six cities or Peoria County, then the county clerk is **not** your local election authority. You have a separate election authority, and you should contact that office for assistance in resolving your election questions.

- **How do I contact my local election authority?** You may find your local election authority's contact information using the Illinois State Board of Election's "Select A Jurisdiction" tool [here](#).
- **How do I contact the State Board of Elections?** You can find contact information for the Illinois State Board of Elections [here](#).

Preparing to Vote

- **How do I confirm that I am registered to vote?** Contact your local election authority or check the Illinois State Board of Elections voter registration look-up [here](#).
- **What if I am not registered to vote?** If you are eligible to vote based on your age, residency, and citizenship, you can contact your local election authority to register or register online [here](#). The online voter registration period closes at 11:59 p.m. on October 18, 2020.

Beginning on October 19, 2020, people who would like to register to vote should contact their local election authorities for more information. You can find your local election authority's contact information using the Illinois State Board of Election's "Select A Jurisdiction" tool [here](#). The deadline for new voters to register and for previously-registered voters to change their address has been extended until the polls close on Election Day (10 ILCS 5/4-50).

People who apply to register to vote by mail but do not provide adequate proof of identification may be ineligible to vote by mail or in person until proof is received. A driver's license, a state ID card or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck or government check can all serve as sufficient proof of identification (10 ILCS 5/4-105).

- **Can I see what my ballot will look like before I go vote?** Many election authorities post sample ballots online. Find your local election authority's website using the "Select A Jurisdiction" tool [here](#).

Mail-In Voting

- **How do I request an application to vote by mail?** Request an application to vote by mail from your local election authority or by downloading the vote-by-mail application [here](#).
- **When is the deadline to submit an application to vote by mail?** If you are temporarily residing outside of the continental United States, are a member of the U.S. military, or are the spouse or voting-age dependent of a member of the military, the last day to apply for an absentee ballot is October 26, 2020. You can find additional information [here](#). All other mailed applications to vote by mail must be received by the local election authority by October 29, 2020. You may submit an application to vote by mail in person to your election authority until November 2, 2020 (10 ILCS 5/19-2).
- **If I request a ballot to vote by mail, when will my ballot be sent to me?** A voter requesting a ballot after October 1, 2020, shall be mailed a ballot no later than two business days after the ballot application is received (10 ILCS 5/2B-20).
- **Can I return my mail-in ballot without using the U.S. Postal Service?** Yes. You can deliver your mail-in ballot to your local election authority, or use a secure mail-in ballot drop box if your local election authority has made them available (10 ILCS 5/2B-20). If you deliver your ballot to a secure mail-in ballot drop box, no postage is required.

Before depositing your ballot in the drop box, however, you should make sure that you follow the directions provided for signing the certificate and sealing the certification envelope. To find the location of mail-in ballot drop boxes, contact your local election authority or use the online tool [here](#).

- **When must I return my mail-in ballot?** If you are returning your mail-in ballot using the U.S. Postal Service, it must be postmarked no later than November 3, 2020 and received by your local election authority by November 17, 2020 (10 ILCS 5/19-8). You may deliver your mail-in ballot to your local election authority in person until the close of the polls at 7 p.m. on November 3, 2020 (10 ILCS 5/2B-20).
- **Can I vote in person, even if I requested a ballot to vote by mail?** Yes. You may vote in person if you bring your mail-in ballot with you to your polling place and give it to the election judges (10 ILCS 5/17-9, 18-5, 19A-35).

If you requested but did not receive a mail-in ballot, then you may vote by signing an affidavit in front of the election judges or election official attesting that you did not receive your mail-in ballot. If you voted and returned your mail-in ballot but your local

election authority informed you that it did not receive your ballot, you may also vote by signing an affidavit in front of the election judges or election official specifying that your local election authority informed you that it did not receive your ballot (10 ILCS 5/17-9, 18-5, 19A-35). If you received a mail-in ballot and did not submit it, but you also did not take your mail-in ballot to your polling place to give to the election judges, you will be asked to vote using a provisional ballot (10 ILCS 5/18A-5).

- **What if my mail-in ballot is rejected?** There is a chance that your mail-in ballot could be rejected. If so, your local election authority must notify you of the reason your ballot was rejected so that you have the opportunity to address the issue. Voters have up to 14 days after the election to address any issues so that the election authority can make a determination as to whether the vote will be counted (10 ILCS 5/2B-20).
- **If I voted in person before my mail-in ballot arrived, should I mail in a ballot too?** No, you should only vote one ballot. Knowingly voting more than once is a felony under Illinois law (10 ILCS 5/29-5).

In-Person Voting

- **When is early voting in Illinois?** Early voting has already begun in Illinois and lasts until Election Day. Contact your local election authority or look up the hours and locations where you may vote early by using the online tool [here](#).
- **What are the voting hours for early voting?** Beginning October 19, 2020, the permanent polling places where early voting is being conducted are required to be open during the hours of 8:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. on weekdays and 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Local election authorities may establish other early voting hours and temporary early voting locations to accommodate voters to whom COVID-19 presents a health risk. Check with your election authority, or look up the hours and locations where you can vote early by using the online tool [here](#).
- **When may I vote on Election Day?** Voters have the right to vote at any time between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Election Day. If a voter is in line when the polls close at 7 p.m., the voter is still entitled to vote and may be granted entry to the polling location (10 ILCS 5/17-1).
- **May I take time away from work or school to vote?** Voters have the right to take unpaid time from work to vote (for no more than two successive hours), if the voter applies for a leave of absence with his or her employer prior to Election Day. The employer may set the time of day when the employee may vote (10 ILCS 5/17-15). Student voters have the right to be absent from school to vote (for no more than two successive hours). The school may specify the hours when the student may vote (10 ILCS 5/17-15).

- **How do I find my polling place?** Contact your local election authority or use the online polling place locator [here](#). Election authorities shall also establish one location at the election authority's office or the largest municipality within its jurisdiction, where all voters are allowed to vote on Election Day during polling place hours regardless of where they are registered to vote (10 ILCS 5/2B-35). Because polling places must sometimes be consolidated or moved as a result of COVID-19 or other issues, it is possible that you will be directed to a new or different polling location. Therefore, you may wish to confirm your polling place's location with your local election authority before traveling to it. You may find your local election authority's contact information using the tool [here](#).

COVID-19 Precautions

- **What health precautions will be in effect at the polling place?** Early voting and Election Day safety and health practices have been established in written guidance provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (10 ILCS 5/2B-35). Each local election authority is required to develop a written COVID-19 prevention plan for each polling place that, at minimum, contains specific COVID-19 safety instructions and training for poll workers related to: cleaning and disinfection protocols; configuration for physical distancing (supplemented by traffic-flow guidelines and placement of physical barriers where distancing is not possible); behaviors required of workers (such as self-monitoring to make sure they do not have symptoms of COVID-19, wearing face coverings, and physical distancing); and procedures to ensure compliance with requirements for social distancing, wearing a face covering, and disinfecting all affected surfaces during the entire polling process. You can find the Illinois Department of Public Health's 2020 Election Day Guidance [here](#).
- **Do I have to wear a face covering to vote?** If you are medically able to tolerate a face covering, you are encouraged (but not required) to do so. You may be offered a face covering at your polling location if you do not already have one. If you decline to wear a face covering, you can still vote. However, you may be sent to an area in the polling location that is separated from voters who are wearing face coverings to wait until it is your turn to vote.
- **Is curbside voting available?** Local election authorities may establish curbside voting for voters to cast a ballot during early voting or on Election Day. A curbside voting program shall designate at least two election judges from different parties per vehicle, and the voter must have the option to mark the ballot without interference from the election judges (10 ILCS 5/2B-35).

Disabled or elderly voters may vote curbside if they have received prior approval to vote outside the polling place due to the structural features of the building. This must also be conducted by two election judges (one from each party) no more than 50 feet away from the entrance to the polling place (10 ILCS 5/17-13).

- **Where do voters who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility vote?** Normally, nursing home and long-term care facility administrators make arrangements for on-premises voting for their residents. However, the Illinois Department of Public Health has limited visitor access to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities to protect residents from COVID-19. Local election authorities and nursing home and long-term care facility administrators should coordinate to make alternate voting arrangements for residents of those facilities. Contact your local election authority to confirm the voting alternative agreed to for your specific nursing home or long-term care facility by using the tool found [here](#).
- **I planned to vote in person, but I am required to quarantine until after Election Day. How should I vote?** If you are required to quarantine or isolate at home and there is still time to request a mail-in ballot, you should obtain a mail-in ballot, and follow the instructions for voting in that manner. If it is too late to obtain a mail-in ballot, you should contact your local election authority and ask whether there is a curbside voting option or a way for you to safely vote at the polling place established at the election authority office. If you are required to isolate in a hospital, on and after October 20, 2020, hospitalized voters may apply to their election authority for personal delivery of a vote-by-mail ballot (10 ILCS 5/19-13).

Other Voter Questions

- **What if I need assistance with my ballot?** If you cannot read, have trouble understanding English, or have a disability, you have the right to request voting assistance from two of the election judges. You may also choose anyone other than your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union to assist you (10 ILCS 5/17-14). To do so, you must sign an affidavit attesting to your need for assistance, **or** present an Illinois Person with a Disability Identification Card. Any person chosen by the voter to provide assistance must sign an oath swearing not to influence the voter's choice while providing assistance.
- **What if I make a mistake on my ballot?** If you make a mistake or "spoil" a paper ballot, and you have not cast the ballot (inserted the ballot into the tabulator), you have the right to receive a replacement ballot (10 ILCS 5/17-11).
- **What is a provisional ballot?** A provisional ballot allows a voter whose eligibility has been questioned to vote on Election Day. Provisional ballots are kept in a separate, securable container until a voter's eligibility to vote is determined by the election authority AFTER Election Day.
- **I voted using a provisional ballot. Is there a way to find out if it was counted?** If you voted using a provisional ballot, you should receive instructions about the steps you need to take to ensure your ballot is counted, how to determine if your ballot was counted, and if not, the reason why it was not counted. Some local election authorities have an online system for voters to check. Those links can be found [here](#).

- **When are ballots counted?** No ballots should be counted until after 7 p.m. on Election Day after the polls close.
- **Who is authorized to be in the polling place?** Only authorized individuals are allowed in the polling place. The authorized individuals include election judges, voters while voting, minor children accompanying their parents or guardians while voting, representatives of the election authority, representatives of the State Board of Elections, representatives of the offices of the state's attorney and Illinois Attorney General, law enforcement officers acting in their official capacities, and authorized poll watchers (10 ILCS 5/17-8, 17-23, 18-6). To be in the polling place on Election Day, persons other than voters must be authorized and have credentials.

If you believe an unauthorized person is in the polling place, notify the election judges.

- **What are poll watchers?** Poll watchers are people who are permitted to observe proceedings in the polling place and are appointed to represent candidates, political parties, organized proponents and opponents of a ballot proposition, and state nonpartisan civic organizations. Poll watchers must be registered to vote in Illinois and must have valid poll watcher credentials for each precinct that they enter. Candidates and precinct committee persons (with proper poll watcher credentials) can be poll watchers in the polling place.
- **What is illegal electioneering, and where is it prohibited?** No one is allowed to try to influence a voter within 100 feet of the polling place (10 ILCS 5/17-29). Illegal electioneering occurs when, within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling room, any person attempts to influence voters or displays political signs, clothing, literature, or buttons. If done properly, exit polling is not electioneering.
- **What should I do if I receive a robocall or electronic communication with inaccurate information about the election?** Robocalls and other electronic communications disseminating inaccurate information about the election may be illegal. Any person who, by force, intimidation, threat, deception, or forgery, knowingly prevents any other person from (a) registering to vote, or (b) lawfully voting is guilty of a Class 4 felony (10 ILCS 5/29-4). An individual who receives a robocall, email, social media message, or other communication that includes inaccurate information should report it to the Office of the Attorney General at 1-800-386-5438 or the Illinois State Board of Elections at 1-217-782-4141 or 312-814-6465.